

**James Madison to George Washington, March 3, 1788. Transcription: The Writings of James Madison, ed. Gaillard Hunt. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1900-1910.**

**TO GEORGE WASHINGTON. WASH. MSS.**

N. York, Feby. 3d., 1788

Dear Sir,

Another mail has arrived from Boston without terminating the conflict between our hopes and fears. I have a letter from Mr. King, of the 27 which after dilating somewhat on the ideas in his former letters, concludes with the following paragraph<sup>1</sup> : "We have avoided every question which would have shewn the division of the House. Of consequence we are not positive of the numbers on each side. By the last calculation we made on our side, we were doubtful whether we exceeded them or they us in numbers. They however say that they

<sup>1</sup> The preceding portion of King's letter is as follows:

"We make but slow progress in our convention, the Friends of the constitution who in addition to their own weight, are respectable as they represent a very large proportion of the Good sense and Property of this state, have the Task not only of answering, but also of stating and bringing forward, the objection of their Opponents—The opposition complain that the Lawyers, Judges, Clergymen, Merchants and men of Education are all in Favor of the constitution, & that for this reason they appear to be able to make the worst, appear the better cause—But say they if we had men of this Description on our side we should alarm the People with the Imperfections of the constitution, & be able to refute the Defense

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set up in its favor—Notwithstanding the superiority of Talents in favor of the constitution yet the same infatuation, which prevailed not many months since in several counties of this state, and which emboldened them to take arms agt the Government seems to have an uncontrollable authority over a numerous part of our Convention—their objections are not directed against any part of the constitution, but their opposition seems to arise from an opinion, that is immovable, that some injury is plotted against them, that the system is the production of the Rich, and ambitious; that they discern its operation, and that the consequence will be, the establishment of two orders in the Society, one comprehending the opulent & Great, the other the poor and illiterate—

“The extraordinary union in favor of the constitution in this state, of the wealthy and sensible part of it is a confirmation of their Opinions and every Exertion hitherto made to eradicate it has been in vain.”— *Mad. MSS.*

have a majority of eight or twelve against us. We by no means despair.” Another letter of the same date from another member gives the following picture<sup>1</sup> : “Never was there an Assembly in this State in possession of greater ability & information than the present Convention. Yet I am in doubt whether they will approve the Constitution. There are unhappily three parties opposed to it—1. all men who are in favor of paper money & tender laws; those are more or less in every part of the State: 2. all the late insurgents & their abettors.—In the three great western Counties they are very numerous. We have in the Convention 18 or 20 who were actually in Shays' army;—3. A great majority of the members from the province of Main. Many of them & their Constituents are only squatters on other people's land, and they are afraid of being brought to account—they also think though erroneously that their favorite plan, of being a separate State will be defeated. Add to these the honest doubting

people, and they make a powerful host. The leaders of this

<sup>1</sup> The letter is not among the Madison MSS.

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party are a Mr. Widgery Mr. Thomson, & Mr. Nason, from the province of Main. A Doctr. Taylor, from the County of Worster & Mr. Bishop from the neighbourhood of R. Island. To manage the cause agst. them are the present and late Govr., 3 Judges of the supreme Court. 15 members of the Senate; 20 from among the most respectable of the Clergy, 10 or 12 of the first characters at the bar, Judges of probate, High sheriffs of Counties & many other respectable people Merchants &c. Genls. Heath, Lincoln, Brooks, & others of the late army. With all this ability in support of the cause, I am pretty well satisfied we shall lose the question, unless we can take off some of the Opposition by amendments. I do not mean such as are to be made conditions of the ratification, but recommendations only. Upon this plan I flatter myself we may possibly get a majority of 12 or 15, if not more."

The Legislature of this State has voted a Convention on the seventeenth of June.